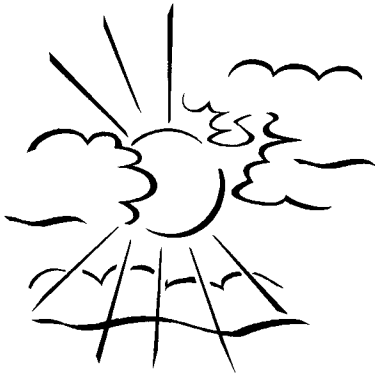


***Department  
of  
Human  
Services***

Prepared by the  
DHS Office of  
Communications  
(517) 373-7394



\*Important story at this spot

# **Articles in Today's Clips**

## **Wednesday, January 18, 2006**

(Be sure to maximize your screen to read your clips)

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# Governor looks for aid for home heating bills

Niles Daily Star

*Tuesday, January 17, 2006 10:03 AM EST*

LANSING - Governor Jennifer M. Granholm has sent a letter to members of the Michigan Public Service Commission (MPSC) calling on the Commission to immediately make \$25 million available for additional assistance for citizens struggling to pay the high cost of home heating bills this winter.

"The high cost of home heating has created a serious financial burden for many of our most vulnerable citizens," Granholm said. "Thanks to the foresight of the MPSC and Consumers Energy, money is available to help, but the Commission must act quickly."

At their December meeting, MPSC commissioners approved an order for Consumers Energy that substantially increased the amount of funds available for low income and energy efficiency programs. The Governor's letter requests that the MPSC specifically dedicate \$25 million of this funding this year to provide low-income assistance.

In addition, the Governor also reiterated her commitment to leading a national effort to encourage Congress to increase funding for the Low Income Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP). Last September, Granholm joined a bi-partisan group of 28 governors who sent a letter to Congressional leaders urging such action.

"Congress must recognize that covering dramatic increases in natural gas and heating oil prices will pose an immense challenge for our citizens as winter arrives," the governors wrote.

"Immediate emergency funding and a significant increase in regular LIHEAP funding for FY 2006 would allow critical energy needs to be addressed before a crisis develops."

For more information about the programs available to help deal with high energy costs, go to [www.michigan.gov/documents/bewinterwise\\_138994\\_7.htm](http://www.michigan.gov/documents/bewinterwise_138994_7.htm).

Published January 18, 2006

## **Michigan utilities to offer new heating aid Program to give thermostats, tips, winterizing kits**

By Stacey Range  
Lansing State Journal

Come Thursday, Laurie Morrow and her family could be awfully cold.

The Lansing woman has until then to figure out what to do about the \$218 she owes Consumers Energy for the past two months' service.

If she doesn't find a solution, the utility will turn off heat in the two-bedroom home where she and her husband are raising their 13-year-old grandson.

"I don't know what I'm going to do," said Morrow, 50. "I've never had to ask for help before. It's embarrassing."

More people, like Morrow, are having trouble paying their heating bills. The state has distributed an average of \$1 million a week in emergency heating aid to low-income residents since November.

Now, to help customers use less energy, Michigan's utility companies have created a program to give away free winterization kits and programmable thermostats.

The Save Energy with Ease program was announced Tuesday by Gov. Jennifer Granholm, the state's major utilities and the Michigan Public Service Commission. It will provide the kits to the first 3,450 residents to attend a two-hour winterization workshop. The workshops will be held in February and March.

The program, which will cost the utility companies \$276,000, also will pay to install programmable thermostats in the homes of 1,500 low-income residents.

Representatives from the utilities, including Consumers, DTE Energy, Indiana Michigan Power Co. and SEMCO Energy Gas Co., said the goal of the program is to help their customers lower their natural gas usage.

"Conservation is the single best way for customers to lower their use and their energy bill," Consumers Energy President John Russell said.

But for such customers as Monique Redmond, that's not enough.

She put plastic insulation over the windows of her north Lansing home, caulked all cracks and holes, and put weatherstripping along doorways.

Redmond, 34, also enrolled in Consumers Energy's winter protection program for low-income households, which keeps them from having service cut off during the coldest months.

The day-care provider still doesn't know how she'll pay her \$239 natural gas bill for December, though.

"The kits are a good idea," Redmond said.

"But even if you do these things, costs are high. People need financial help with their bills."

Granholm said she doesn't expect the kits will eliminate the need for financial help.

But, she said, they will lower the burden on some families.

"There is some homeowner responsibility in this," Granholm said.

"But we're going to try from every angle to provide relief this winter."

The governor also reiterated her call Tuesday for Congress to increase federal funding for the Low Income Energy Assistance Program, which helps residents facing shutoff pay their heating bills.

Michigan has received \$114.4 million in federal aid since Oct. 1, 2005, to help 25,625 households with funding from that program, said Maureen Sorbet, spokeswoman for the Michigan Department of Human Services.

Contact Stacey Range at 377-1157 or [srange@lsj.com](mailto:srange@lsj.com).

# Get help saving energy, money

*Wire, staff reports*

Consumers have heard the same story from natural gas providers for months: Winterize your home and dial down the thermostat to lower monthly bills.

While weather-stripping and caulk certainly cost less than the high-priced heat slipping through the cracks, it still is not affordable for many local residents.

Help, for a limited number of people, is on the way.

Michigan's utilities announced Tuesday, via Gov. Jennifer Granholm's office, they would put \$276,000 into a state program that will help gas and electric customers winterize their homes and save on energy bills.

The Save Energy with Ease program will provide free two-hour winterization workshops and home energy conservation kits that include programmable thermostats, caulk, compact fluorescent light bulbs, window insulation, door weather-stripping and other energy-saving materials to the first 3,450 Michigan residents who apply.

Locally, about 120 residents will have the opportunity to attend workshops and receive winterization kits through the Community Action Agency of South Central Michigan, serving Calhoun, Barry, Branch and St. Joseph counties.

CAA spokeswoman Teri Barker said program participants would be accepted on a first-come, first-serve basis.

MPSC spokeswoman, Judy Pelnau, said four classes in February — capped at about 30 people per session — would be conducted by the local CAA, but have yet to be scheduled.

"People should call their local CAA for more information about class dates and times," Pelnau said. "Some areas still have dates pending."

The program also will install programmable thermostats to 1,500 low-income residents already receiving weatherization services through the Michigan Department of Human Services.

The program is being funded by SEMCO Energy Gas Co., which serves customers in the Battle Creek area, DTE Energy, Consumers Energy Co. and Indiana Michigan Power Co. The Michigan Public Service Commission is overseeing the program, along with the Michigan Electric and Gas Association, the Michigan Department of Human Services and the Michigan Community Action Agency Association.

The weatherization workshops will be in February and March through local community action agencies. People should contact their local community action agency to register.

Granholm last week asked the commission to make \$25 million more available for low-income energy assistance. She also has called on Congress to increase federal funding for the Low Income Energy Assistance Program that helps low-income residents pay their heating bills.

Originally published January 18, 2006

Wednesday, January 18, 2006

## **Free kits help trim soaring heating bills 5,000 residents may seek packages that assist in energy conservation and home winterization.**

Mark Hornbeck / Detroit News Lansing Bureau

**LANSING** -- Michigan's utilities will ante up \$276,000 for programmable thermostats and home winterization kits to help cash-strapped residents reduce their soaring winter heat bills, Gov. Jennifer Granholm announced Tuesday.

Some 1,500 low-income residents already getting state weatherization services will be eligible to have the thermostats, which automatically dial down during nighttime hours, installed in their homes at no charge.

There is no income threshold for another 3,450 residents who can get the thermostats and energy conservation kits if they take a local two-hour class on energy conservation.

"With natural gas costs at record highs, too many Michigan residents are struggling to pay their bills," said Gov. Jennifer Granholm. She said the state already has awarded \$51 million in grants to help the poor pay their heat bills, and another \$25 million in assistance is on the way.

Home heating bills will go up 46 percent this winter, reports the Public Service Commission, with the average monthly fee rising \$59 from \$128 to \$187. Natural gas is in short supply, partly because storms knocked out processing facilities in the gulf region.

DTE Energy, Consumers Energy Co., Indiana Michigan Power Co. and SEMCO Energy Gas Co. shelled out the \$276,000 to pay for the thermostats and conservation kits.

The kits include a caulking gun, fluorescent light bulbs, plastic window insulation, door weather stripping, foam inserts for electrical outlets and other items intended to help gas and electric customers trim their bills.

The workshops will be held in February and March and be administered by local Community Action agencies. Spots in the classes are first come, first served. Those who want to attend should contact their Community Action Agency. A list is available on the Public Service Commission Web site at [www.michigan.gov/mpsc](http://www.michigan.gov/mpsc) or call toll-free at (800) 292-9555.

Utility officials said some customers have had their heat turned off this winter for nonpayment of utility bills. Specific numbers weren't available. Heat will not be cut off to low-income residents, seniors or customers who call to work out a plan to pay bills that are in arrears, they said.

"But customers (not paying their bills) who can afford to pay, they do get shut off," said John Russell, president and chief operating officer of Consumers Energy.

Consumers Energy reports 2,917 customers had their heat shut off in November and December, slightly higher than last year. The utility also reports 57,000 customers are in the emergency winter protection heating assistance program, which is well above a year ago.

*You can reach Mark Hornbeck at (313) 222-2470 or [mhornbeck@detnews.com](mailto:mhornbeck@detnews.com).*

## Michigan Report

January 17, 2006

**FREE THERMOSTATS:** Low-income residents in the state would qualify for free programmable thermostats and other residents could sign up for classes that carry the thermostats as a reward.

The Save Energy With Ease Program, funded through contributions from the state's major utilities, will provide some 1,500 of the energy-saving thermostats to those already receiving state energy assistance. Another 3,450 will be included as part of energy assistance kits given out at seminars to be run local community action agencies.

Public Service Commission Chair Peter Lark said the Department of Human Services would begin working with low-income residents or their landlords to arrange installation of the thermostats. Sign-up for the two-hour seminars, which would include instruction on installing the thermostats, would also begin in the coming weeks with the programs expected to run in late February and early March.

Governor Jennifer Granholm, who was particularly enamored of the thermostat brought in for display at the press conference, also took the announcement as another opportunity to call on the federal government to restore and increase funding for low income heating assistance programs.

# **Utility companies to offer free thermostats under new program**

January 17, 2006

BY DAWSON BELL  
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

Up to 1,500 low-income utility customers are eligible to receive free, energy saving thermostats (and free installation) in the next few months, under a program to combat soaring energy costs announced by utility companies and regulators today.

The program, "Save Energy With Ease," will also make available energy conservation kits to about 3,500 customers at all income levels, according to Gov. Jennifer Granholm and representatives of Michigan's leading utilities.

The assistance comes on top of the major financial program for low income residents who are having trouble paying their gas and electric bills. Granholm said that program has authorized \$51 million in grant money, and that she has asked the Michigan Public Service Commission to provide another \$25 million.

Executives from Consumers Energy, DTE Energy, Indiana Michigan Power Co. and SEMCO Energy Gas Co. joined Granholm at a Lansing news conference and said they were hopeful the array of programs would reduce the burden from sharp price hikes in natural gas prices since last fall.



# State, utility companies offer energy saving program

1/17/2006, 12:35 p.m. ET

The Associated Press

LANSING, Mich. (AP) — Michigan's utilities are putting \$276,000 into a state program that will help gas and electric customers winterize their homes and save on energy bills, Gov. Jennifer Granholm announced Tuesday.

The Save Energy with Ease program will provide free two-hour winterization work shops and home energy conservation kits that include programmable thermostats, caulk, compact fluorescent light bulbs, window insulation, door weather-stripping and other energy-saving materials to the first 3,450 Michigan residents who apply.

The program also will install programmable thermostats to 1,500 low-income residents already receiving weatherization services through the Michigan Department of Human Services.

The program is being funded by DTE Energy, Consumers Energy Co., Indiana Michigan Power Co. and SEMCO Energy Gas Co. The Michigan Public Service Commission is overseeing the program, along with the Michigan Electric and Gas Association, the Michigan Department of Human Services and the Michigan Community Action Agency Association.

The weatherization work shops will be held in February and March through local community action agencies. People should contact their local community action agency to register. A list of agencies is available on the Public Service Commission's Web site, or can be gotten by calling (800) 292-9555.

Granholm last week asked the commission to make \$25 million more available for low-income energy assistance. She also has called on Congress to increase federal funding for the Low Income Energy Assistance Program that helps low-income residents pay their heating bills.

# Heat-help pledge drops by \$36,000

Wednesday, January 18, 2006

By Brian Wheeler

[bwheeler@citpat.com](mailto:bwheeler@citpat.com) -- 768-4928

The city of Jackson will not be donating as much as anticipated to nonprofit groups to help heat the homes of Jackson County's poor.

Mayor Martin Griffin said Tuesday that city officials have learned they likely won't have more than \$14,000 in federal Community Development Block Grant money that can go toward the cause. The city had pledged \$50,000.

The city has \$1.2 million in unspent CDBG money -- its overall administration of the funds has been questioned in recent weeks -- but only 15 percent can go toward such efforts as covering heating bills. Most of that has been given to other agencies, Griffin said.

Griffin's comments came at a Jackson forum on heating costs, part of a burgeoning community response. Natural gas prices are projected to grow 50 percent this winter.

The United Way of Jackson County and others last week said they had collected about \$90,000 in pledges to help struggling residents pay their bills. However, that amount reflected getting \$50,000 from the city.

Ken Toll, the United Way's executive director, said the city's full \$50,000 donation would have been good but isn't essential.

"We will continue looking out there" for money, he said. "We're committed to writing other grants, seeking other partners and raising funds."

Regardless of the city's involvement, local officials and residents painted a stark picture at Tuesday's forum, organized by state Sen. Mark Schauer.

Kathryn Keersmaekers, Consumers Energy's local area manager, called higher heating prices "the new norm," while residents complained about rising costs, despite turning down the thermostat.

"Friday or Saturday, I was sitting in my own house and my nose was cold. My ears were cold. I'm freezing to death in my own house," said Marchita Wilson, who said she recently received the highest energy bill in the 36 years she has lived in her Jackson home, but is making her payments.

Those who cannot pay can get help by calling the local 211 information line, which will link them to the United Way-backed effort or to other charities. Churches and groups such as the Salvation Army and Community Action Agency also offer help.

Also Tuesday, Gov. Jennifer Granholm announced Michigan's utilities are putting \$276,000 into a state program that will help residents winterize their homes and save on energy bills.

The program, called Save Energy with Ease, will provide free two-hour winterization workshops and home energy conservation kits that include programmable thermostats, caulk, compact fluorescent light bulbs, window insulation, door weather-stripping and other energy-saving materials to the first 3,450 Michigan residents who apply.

The program -- to be run locally by the Community Action Agency -- also will install programmable thermostats to 1,500 low-income residents already receiving weatherization services through the Michigan Department of Human Services.

The program is being funded by DTE Energy, Consumers Energy, Indiana Michigan Power Co. and SEMCO Energy Gas Co.

-- The Associated Press contributed to this story.

# HHS Works to Fix Drug Plan Woes

## Widespread Difficulties With New Medicare Benefit Reported

By Ceci Connolly Washington Post Staff Writer

Wednesday, January 18, 2006; Page A03

President Bush's top health advisers will fan out across the country this week to quell rising discontent with a new Medicare prescription drug benefit that has tens of thousands of elderly and disabled Americans, their pharmacists, and governors struggling to resolve myriad start-up problems.

Health and Human Services Secretary Mike Leavitt, who will visit Oregon and California, said yesterday that 24 million Medicare beneficiaries now have prescription coverage, compared with the 20.4 million who had been receiving drug benefits last year through state- or employer-sponsored plans. That means the new program, expected to cost \$700 billion in the first 10 years, is providing drug coverage to 3.6 million new retirees.

In a call with reporters, Leavitt said enrollment in the program, called Medicare Part D, exceeded expectations and put the administration "well on track to meet our goal of enrolling 28 to 30 million in the first year." Last year, officials predicted 39 million seniors and disabled people would participate, according to documents published in the Federal Register on Jan. 28, 2005.

In the past month, 2.6 million people have signed up for a drug plan. Seniors have until May 15 to enroll. Even as federal leaders touted the enrollment figures, state officials and health care experts continued to report widespread difficulties, especially for the poorest and sickest seniors who were forced to switch from state Medicaid programs to the new Medicare plans on Jan. 1. Nearly two dozen states have intervened, saying they will pay for medications for any low-income senior who is mistakenly rejected. The District, Maryland and Virginia have not intervened.

Saying "it is time for us to take care of our own," Republican Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger said California will spend as much as \$150 million to provide medications to as many as 1 million low-income seniors who have been turned away by pharmacists or overcharged co-payments because of glitches in computer databases.

"Right now, the new Medicare Part D prescription drug program is not working as intended," the governor said in a release.

In a letter to Bush, 14 Democratic governors wrote that, "while well-intended, the new Medicare drug benefit has caused confusion, mismanagement, and a bureaucratic nightmare."

Leavitt conceded that HHS caseworkers have responded to tens of thousands of complaints by seniors, pharmacists and others who could not get the correct medications at the correct price. But he promised to "fix every problem as quickly as possible."

To do that, HHS has hired thousands of customer service representatives and set up special phone lines for pharmacists. It also has notified insurers that if a drug is not going to be covered, the plans must provide a 30-day "transitional" supply until the patient's physician can recommend a comparable medicine that is covered.

"Since this is a new program, some people may experience a problem the first time they go to get their medicines, but we're confident that after you use it once, things are going to go more smoothly," he said. "If you are one of those seniors experiencing problems, our message is don't leave the pharmacy without your drugs."

Starting an enormous insurance program for 42 million people is bound to entail bumps, Leavitt said. "For the majority of people who are enrolled in the drug benefit, the system's working," he added. "Pharmacists across the country are filling more than 1 million prescriptions a day successfully. Seniors are continuing to enroll in large numbers."

Precise figures are not available, but government officials and researchers at health care think tanks said pharmacists were filling hundreds of thousands of prescriptions for previously eligible Medicare recipients before the Jan. 1 start of the new program.

"Many of the people already had coverage in 2005," said Tricia Neuman, who studies Medicare policy issues at the nonpartisan Kaiser Family Foundation. "The numbers show there's been some progress since December, but we clearly have a ways to go to reach everyone the program was designed to help." Medicare's actuaries reported that 8 million seniors would be eligible for subsidized drug coverage, based on income levels, and they projected 4.6 million would enroll in 2006. So far, 1.1 million are signed up, she said.

Published January 18, 2006

## **Medicare: Drug aid backed by area lawmakers continues to cause trouble**

A Lansing State Journal editorial

The new Medicare prescription drug program is causing all sorts of problems in Michigan and nationwide. The prime culprit seems to be confusion over so-called "dual eligibles" - people in the most need of government aid.

There should be no confusion over a solution, however. Rewrite the Medicare program now to focus exclusively on the truly needy; not on needy and affluent seniors alike.

Since Jan. 1, Michigan seniors, pharmacies and public officials have scrambled to ensure the right drugs get to the right people, and at the right prices. Most of the trouble stems from the decision to randomly assign more than 200,000 recipients to drug insurance plans - whether those plans met their needs or not.

This is just another obvious flaw in a Medicare program stuffed with them:

- The program is far too expensive - costing taxpayers at least \$700 billion over the next decade.
- The program is far too broad, giving access to millions of seniors who didn't need additional government aid.
- The program is a giveaway to pharmaceutical firms because Congress barred Medicare from negotiating deep discounts in drug prices - a practice used effectively in other government programs.

And now we can see the program is overwhelmed by the administrative burden of trying to keep track of so many seniors with widely different medical and financial needs.

It could have been different, of course. A drug benefit targeted solely to the neediest seniors - as established by personal income and drug use - is feasible. It wouldn't overwhelm the Treasury or government computers.

It could be in operation now, had Congress not, instead, endorsed the existing, flawed law - thanks in large measure to mid-Michigan Congressmen Dave Camp, Vern Ehlers and Mike Rogers. (See <http://clerk.house.gov/evs/2003/roll669.xml>.)

Had these three Republicans voted the other way in 2003, the Medicare plan would have failed in the House. And America would now be much closer to real health reform.

# **Blues Cruiser to help disabled with Rx benefits**

HOMETOWN HEADLINES

FLINT

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION  
Wednesday, January 18, 2006

By Shantell M. Kirkendoll  
skirkendoll@flintjournal.com • 810.766.6366

FLINT - It's not just the elderly who are affected by changes in Medicare. The disabled are facing enrollment issues, too, as they consider new prescription drug benefits for Medicare enrollees.

Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan will park its Blues Cruiser, a mobile education unit, at the Disability Network from 10 a.m.-2 p.m. Jan. 26. The Disability Network is at 3600 S. Dort Highway, No. 54.

A Blue Cross representative will be available to answer questions about coverage, provide enrollment information, and provide a video presentation on coverage options.

Details: (810) 742-1800.

# **The problem with health care is not everyone gets insured**

Re: Keith Nash's Jan. 6 letter, "Canada's health-care plan is nothing we should adopt," and *TalkBack* caller Terry's Jan. 3 comment against Canada's health insurance: Even those who have health-care coverage have been in a situation where they had to postpone or have lost their health-care coverage from a lost job until a new one surfaced.

Health-care reform has been a matter of debate. Unfortunately, I'm afraid that is all it is. Nothing is being done to cut the costs of prescriptions, doctor visits, hospital stays and those who are cared for by the state.

Nash said: "The only ones who get great care in Canada are those who can afford to cross into the United States and pay for services here or those who work here with an company insurance plan."

Why are we in a situation where significant numbers of the elderly, the sick, the disabled and the children are without health coverage, while others have health insurance throughout their entire lifetime?

JOANNE RUMFORD

Port Huron, Jan. 13

Originally published January 18, 2006

Published January 18, 2006

[ From the Lansing State Journal ]

## **ERs: Meth top cause of drug-related visits**

By Donna Leinwand  
Gannett News Service

WASHINGTON - Methamphetamine accounts for more emergency room visits than any other drug, a survey released today by the National Association of Counties finds.

The survey of 200 hospitals run or funded by counties in 39 states and Washington, D.C., shows that 47 percent said methamphetamine is the top illicit drug involved in emergency room visits. Sixteen percent said marijuana, and 15 percent said cocaine.

"This is a national problem," association spokesman Tom Goodman said. "The costs of methamphetamine are placing a great strain on county governments."

Of the hospitals surveyed, 73 percent said emergency room cases involving meth have increased over the past five years, and 56 percent said hospital costs have risen because of the treatment of meth patients.

Methamphetamine is a highly addictive stimulant that can be cooked up in home labs using cold pills and other common ingredients.

Nearly 12 million people in the U.S. have used meth at least once in their lives, according to responses to the 2004 National Survey on Drug Use and Health conducted by the Department of Health and Human Services. About 1.4 million had used meth in the past year.

A separate survey by the counties association of 200 treatment program directors in 35 states and the District found that 69 percent reported an increased number of people seeking treatment for meth use.

January 17, 2006

## **CHILD CARE SEX ALLEGATIONS** **PROMPT LAWMAKERS TO TAKE** **ACTION**

Senator Bill Hardiman (R-Kentwood) called on Department of Human Service executives to provide him with answers concerning childcare licensing policies, use of pornography by childcare licensees and parental notifications.

The Senate Family and Human Services Committee began hearings on Tuesday to address gaps in licensing procedures; hearings that follow a Grand Rapids case where a licensed home provider allegedly molested two young girls in their care. DHS has received criticism for ignoring the recommendations of a DHS investigator to revoke the home of Khristopher and Amanda Cross' license in 2004.

The case left Mr. Hardiman with many questions about DHS procedures in such cases.

DHS administration decided against revocation because there wasn't enough evidence following the sexual misconduct case in 2004, but according to Grand Rapids Press report police seized a computer with pornographic images on it at that time.

Jim Gale, director of Office of Children and Adult Licensing said those images were not reported to DHS as being girls under 18. Police and administrators believed the images were of women rather minors. It wasn't until February 2005 when criminal pathologists determined Mr. Cross possessed child pornography. Still, in May 2005, Mr. and Ms. Cross renewed their state license.

According to written DHS testimony provided to Mr. Hardiman, at some point in the summer of 2005 Mr. and Ms. Cross's purchased an Alpine Township day care center, however, the former owner renewed the license and she claimed to have continued to operate the center. The Kent County Clerk office has no record of a business transfer, but Mr. Cross has made public statements indicating he and his wife own the Family and Friends Day Care Center. Meanwhile, this past August a second child made sexual misconduct allegations against Mr. Cross. In December Mr. And Mrs. Cross voluntarily withdrew their childcare licenses.

"What are the policies concerning revoking or suspended a child care license? And when do parents get notified of allegation," Mr. Hardiman asked. He also asked about the relationships between law enforcement agents and DHS, and how pornography plays into the decision to renew or revoke a childcare license.



Mr. Hardiman gave the department 30 days to respond to his line of questioning

Mr. Gale answered many of the questions, but admitted to being short staffed and lacking resources. He said his 58 consultants are responsible for 17,5000 childcare homes and centers. He said each consultant oversees 306 centers and homes.

“Last year there were 2,030 childcare complaints made and I’m left with the challenge of a limited staff,” he said. “Complaints investigations should be the highest priority.”

# State worker wanted accused molester's license revoked

Wednesday, January 18, 2006

By Ken Kolker  
The Grand Rapids Press

LANSING -- Months before Kristopher Cross was charged with sexually abusing children in his Grand Rapids day-care home and keeping child pornography, a state worker recommended his day-care license be revoked.

But state Department of Human Services administrators in Lansing overruled her, according to testimony Tuesday before a state Senate subcommittee.

A retired day-care licensing consultant, who investigated day cares for 20 years in the Grand Rapids area, said it wasn't unusual for state administrators to overrule workers in the field.

"The directors in Lansing seem to be more worried about the press and the Legislature, instead of protecting Michigan's most vulnerable citizens," Noreen Betteridge, of Hudsonville, testified.

She retired recently and was not involved in the Cross case.

The Senate Families and Human Services Committee, chaired by Sen. Bill Hardiman, R-Kentwood, heard testimony Tuesday over mistakes Hardiman says were made in the Cross case. Hardiman believes the state should have revoked Cross' day-care license early last year based on sexual abuse allegations alone, and should not have waited for criminal charges.

At the least, the state should not have renewed the license in May -- months after the allegations were made, he said.

He expects to hold another hearing and said the case could lead to changes in state law and policy.

"We're going to look at the department's response ... to ensure that our children are well-protected," Hardiman said.

Cross, 33, is accused of sexually assaulting three girls, ages 5 to 7, at the home he operated with his wife on Fuller Avenue NE. The assaults allegedly occurred between late 2001 and 2004, but charges were not filed until September, police said.

# Mother's boyfriend bound over

Wednesday, January 18, 2006

By Steven Hepker  
shepker@citpat.com -- 768-4923

Sheriff's Deputy Anthony Shepard saw the battered little girl and questioned her father figure, her mom's 6-foot-4, live-in boyfriend.

"He kind of laughed, shrugged his shoulders and said he guessed he had an anger-management problem," Shepard testified Tuesday.

District Judge Darryl Mazur heard from Shepard and the victim's mother before binding William Trainer over to Circuit Court for trial. He faces counts of second-degree child abuse and assault with intent to do great bodily harm.

The girl's mother testified that her 4-year-old daughter was fine when she left for work at 7 a.m. Jan. 3, and still OK at noon when she came home for lunch. At 1:30 p.m., Trainer called her from their house trailer at 2240 Brooklyn Road.

"He notified me he had spanked her," she said. "He said I need to address it when I get home." The girl's face was red and puffy when the mother arrived home at 5:30 p.m., but she put her to bed without a bath, she said. She explained the girl's face normally became red and swollen when she cried.

When the mother awoke at 11:30 a.m. the next day, she said she was shocked by her daughter's appearance.

"I noticed two black eyes, a purple rear end and more bruises than I care to count," she testified. "I lost it."

More than 80 percent of the girl's buttocks were bruised, Assistant Prosecutor Jessica Sutherland said.

"When I asked him why, he said she broke a toy," the mother testified.

Under questioning by defense attorney Susan Dehncke, the mother said Trainer was affectionate with her daughter during the eight months he lived with them.

The defense is that the mother gave Trainer permission to spank her child, but his discipline got out of control. Dehncke argued against bind-over on the assault charge, a 10-year felony, saying Trainer did not intend to cause great bodily harm.

Shepard testified Trainer admitted he "banged her off the wall a few times" and back-handed the girl's face. The deputy said Trainer showed no hint of remorse that night.

Trainer remains in the Jackson County Jail under a \$100,000 bond. Circuit Judge Charles Nelson will arraign him Feb. 7.

# Man pleads no contest to 15 child sex-related charges

By John Michalak

Royal Oak Daily Tribune Staff Writer

PUBLISHED: January 18, 2006

PONTIAC — A Hazel Park man who paid five teenage girls more than \$1,000 to pose nude for him pleaded no contest Monday to 15 sex-related charges.

Hazel Park Detective Sgt. Jason Weimer said a condition of the no contest pleas calls for John Anthony Adams, 64, to hand over any sexually explicit photos and video tapes he took of the girls.

Following Adams' arrest early last year, police searched his residence on the 400 block of West Muir, but found no pictures or video tapes, Weimer said.

Five girls were ready to testify for the prosecution Monday when Adams made the no contest plea.

A no contest plea isn't an admission of guilt, but is treated as such in a criminal case. However, a no contest plea can't be used as evidence against a defendant in a civil trial.

Defense Attorney Frederick Miller said the civil liability issue was the biggest reason Adams pleaded no contest.

"If the young ladies wanted to sue they couldn't use (the no contest pleas) in a civil court," Miller said. "They could if he was found guilty.

"It was his choice. If he wanted to go to trial we were ready to go. It was a safer route to go."

Oakland County Assistant Prosecuting Attorney Matthew Roth said Adams' actions didn't come from plea bargaining.

"This was not a plea bargain," Roth said. "He pleaded no contest as charged. We don't negotiate cases like this."

Miller said Oakland County Circuit Judge Gene Schnelz indicated the maximum low end of the sentences will be 45 months in prison. The high end could be up to 20 years and possibly 30 years if Adams is determined to be a habitual offender, Roth said.

Adams, Roth added, pleaded to 13 counts of child sexually abusive activity, punishable by up to 20 years in prison, and two counts of third degree criminal sexual conduct, 15 year felonies. Three misdemeanor charges of contributing to the delinquency of a minor were tossed.

Roth said the misdemeanors — punishable by up to 93 days in jail — "dwarfed" in comparison to 15 felony charges.

"The best part of this is none of the victims had to come forward and

testify about things they did when they were younger and embarrassed about," Roth said.

The victims were ages 14 to 16 at the time of the crimes that went back to 1998, Roth said.

Weimer said initially none of the girls would cooperate with police until a boyfriend supplied police with information.

"Finally one of the girls spoke up," Weimer said. "Then we ran with it."

Weimer said Adams paid the girls between \$60 and \$200 to pose nude and provided them with alcohol and "a place to party."

The number of charges doesn't reflect the number of incidents, Weimer added.

"There were other victims who would not cooperate," Weimer said. "We believe there were maybe around 10 victims including those identified in the charges."

# Woman, 31, who pleaded guilty to 'despicable' sex acts sentenced

Monday, January 18, 2006

By Robert C. Burns  
CHRONICLE STAFF WRITER

A 31-year-old Ravenna woman who sent pictures of herself having sex with minor children over the Internet was sentenced to six to 20 years in prison Tuesday.

Muskegon County Circuit Judge Timothy G. Hicks downplayed Jennifer Kay Phillips' mental-health history along with claims that she had been coerced by a man in another state to commit various sexual acts with male and female children ranging from 7 to 15 years of age.

Her attorney, Holly Baker, had asked the court to impose less than the agreed-upon minimum sentence of six years in prison, but Hicks was not moved.

"This is one of the most despicable things I've seen in about the last 10 years," he said. "You have not only robbed these children of their innocence, but a good chunk of their youth. I'm real comfortable with this sentence."

Phillips, who has been incarcerated since her arrest in August, appeared for sentencing in a dark blue jail jumpsuit with chains wrapped around her waist. She did not address the court before sentencing. A parent of one of the victims also was present in court, according to Baker, but chose not to speak.

In November, Phillips pleaded guilty to three charges of sexually abusive activity and a fourth involving the use of a computer to commit a crime. All are felonies with a maximum sentence of 20 years.

Last month, Phillips tried to withdraw her guilty pleas and stand trial. Baker said her client decided against it because the children would have had to testify, and because doing so could have left her open to more prison time than the agreed-upon six-year minimum.

Sheriff's detectives said Phillips recorded the sex acts with a Web cam and sent them over the Internet to a man they believe resides in Waterville, Maine. A search of the man's home yielded a computer which was found to contain child pornography.

He has not yet been charged, however. Muskegon County Sheriff's Detective Shane Brown said authorities in Waterville are looking for evidence linking the man to the Muskegon case, for which possible charges may be filed here.

Baker said the man had issued "an extortion-type threat" to report Phillips to authorities and also to harm the children if she did not do as he ordered.

"She was protecting her children," Baker told the judge. "She wouldn't enjoy this type of behavior."

Phillips received the same 6-to-20-year sentence on each count, but by law they must be served at the same time.

Hicks decided not to order the defendant to register as a sex offender, but said he would entertain a prosecutor's motion to that effect.

# Police seek man who assaulted student, 12

POLICE BLOTTER

FLINT

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Wednesday, January 18, 2006

By Kim Crawford

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FLINT - Flint police are looking for a man who assaulted a 12-year-old Gundry Elementary School student near the school last week.

The man was about 6-foot-3, 150 pounds and in his 30s. He wore dirty blue pants and a brown short-sleeved shirt, said Sgt. Henry Younger of the Flint Police Department's Juvenile Division. The student was leaving the south end of Gundry Elementary, 6031 Dupont St., between 3:30 p.m. and 4 p.m. Jan. 10 when the man approached him and demanded money, Younger said. When the child said he didn't have any, the man punched him, knocked him to the ground and kicked him before running away, police said.

The student's mother told police she would take him to a local hospital for treatment of injuries to his lip and back, Younger said.

The Flint School District has video surveillance of the school's exterior, and a tape was turned over to Flint police. It's not known if the incident was caught on video.

Police also are seeking a second suspect who stood nearby during the assault, possibly as a lookout.

The suspect appeared to be very intoxicated, the student told police.

Anyone with information about the incident is asked to call Flint police Sgt. Tony Pittman of the robbery squad at (810) 237-6934.

# 18 sexual predator bills go into effect

By MELISSA DOMSIC

The State News

Registered sex offenders can't live, work or loiter within 1,000 feet of Michigan schools, with few exceptions, after new legislation went into effect this year.

Gov. Jennifer Granholm signed 18 child protection bills in September which went into effect Jan. 1.

Along with the 1,000-foot safety zone, the laws ban registered sex offenders from working at schools and require all school employees to notify the school if they are convicted of a sex crime. The laws also allow the use of previous sex crimes as character evidence in trials. Under the new laws, child care center operators and all school employees must have background checks. Contract workers who visit the schools on a regular basis are also subject to the checks.

Registered sex offenders must notify state authorities when they change residences as well.

"Schools should be a place where children are safe," said Sandy Gebber, a fifth grade teacher at Glencairn Elementary School.

Registered sex offenders who lived or worked within a school safety zone before the law went into effect, or offenders who sometimes need to enter the zone for work, are exceptions to the law. Offenders who are in a jail or are patients at a facility within the zone are also exempt.

Tina Sydnor hasn't thought about sexual predators preying on her children at East Lansing Public Schools, but said the legislation is great.

"Whatever means necessary, we need to protect our children," Sydnor said.

State Rep. Ed Gaffney, R-Grosse Pointe Farms, sponsored the bill creating a zone around schools because one of his constituents was upset about a sexual predator moving near a Grosse Pointe school.

Originally the zone was set at one mile but was later set to 1,000 feet, or about one-fifth of a mile — the length of the drug-free safety zone around Michigan schools, Gaffney said.

East Lansing police Officer Candace Ridenour, a school liaison officer who works with MacDonald Middle School, said she'd like to see a larger safety zone.

"But I think 1,000 feet is reasonable," Ridenour said. "It's certainly going to keep predators off the property or at least if they're found on the property we can take action now."



# Boston Court Approves Ending Life Support for Girl in Coma

By PAM BELLUCK  
The New York Times

Published: January 18, 2006

BOSTON, Jan. 17 - Massachusetts's highest court ruled Tuesday that the state can withdraw life support from Haleigh Poutre, an 11-year-old girl who has been in a coma since September, and whose adoptive mother and stepfather are accused of abusing her.

Haleigh, of Westfield, Mass., was hospitalized on Sept. 11 with a brain injury and multiple bruises, burns and cuts. Her aunt Holli Strickland, who adopted her, and Ms. Strickland's husband, Jason Strickland, were charged with assault, but Ms. Strickland died in an apparent murder-suicide after charges were filed.

The state Department of Social Services, which was granted custody of Haleigh, successfully petitioned a juvenile court for permission to remove life support. Mr. Strickland challenged the state in court, asking to be considered Haleigh's de facto parent and to be allowed to argue for keeping her alive.

The Supreme Judicial Court rejected Mr. Strickland's petition on Tuesday, saying he did not provide enough of her daily care to be a de facto parent. The court added that Mr. Strickland "stands charged with criminal assault in connection with injuries inflicted on" Haleigh. "To recognize the petitioner as a de facto parent, in order that he may participate in a medical end-of-life decision for the child, is unthinkable."

The opinion also upheld the state's right to remove life support, saying that Haleigh "is in an irreversible and permanent coma, with the least amount of brain function that a person can have and still be considered alive."

Mr. Strickland's lawyer, John J. Egan, said he was "disappointed they chose to decide it on the most narrow ground possible and not address the more substantive issues." Mr. Strickland might be able to pursue the case in federal court, but Mr. Egan said no decision had been made.

Denise Monteiro, a spokeswoman for the Department of Social Services, said that Haleigh's doctors would re-evaluate her and that family members would be consulted before life support would be removed.

One relative being consulted is Allison Avrett, Haleigh's biological mother, who lost custody of her when she was 4 because of accusations that her boyfriend had sexually abused Haleigh. Ms.

Avrett said Tuesday that the ruling made her feel "good and bad" and that she supported removing both the ventilator and the feeding tube.

The court's opinion noted a raft of complaints about abuse and neglect of Haleigh to the Department of Social Services since September 2002 and indicated that the department had been talking to Ms. Strickland about placing Haleigh in a residential treatment facility. Since 2004, the state had arranged regular counseling for Haleigh and was making monthly inspection visits to the home. The state is investigating why it did not catch the extent of Haleigh's abuse.

"Some describe this as a case about death," the opinion said. "It should more correctly be described as a case about a young girl who has suffered tremendously from acts of violence and cruelty and who now will be permitted to pass away with dignity."

The opinion added that Haleigh's "memory will remind us, time and again, that we, as a society, need to do more to aid children who are neglected and abused, and thereby denied the care and nurturing they so desperately want and need."

# **Is young killer ready for society?**

## **Progress hearing focuses on how much Nathaniel Abraham has been rehabilitated since he murdered at age 11.**

Jennifer Chambers / The Detroit News

January 18, 2006

**PONTIAC** -- The clock is ticking on the youngest person convicted of murder in Michigan. Nathaniel Abraham, who was 11 years old when he fired a sniper shot from a hilltop in Pontiac, killing an 18-year-old man, has one year and one day left in his second-degree murder sentence. At the end of that time, Abraham, who at age 13 in 1999 was the youngest person convicted of murder in the United States, will walk out of state custody and be released into society.

But prosecutors say Abraham is still not rehabilitated, despite eight years in a juvenile detention and treatment center, and should stay locked up until he is 21.

"He is the youngest murderer in Michigan. Prosecutors are watching this case. The public is watching this case. It's Nathaniel's turn in a year and two days to show us what he has learned," Deborah Carley, chief deputy prosecutor for Oakland County, said Tuesday.

But the Oakland County judge who gave Abraham a second chance at life by sentencing him as a juvenile is hopeful Abraham will make enough progress over the next few months to go to a halfway house and learn how to live on the outside -- all by his 21st birthday.

On Tuesday, a team of lawyers, social workers, police, family members and survivors gathered for a progress report on Abraham, who walked into Oakland Circuit Court handcuffed.

In the last three months, Abraham, now 19, has toured three halfway houses in mid-Michigan, speaking with staff and learning of the daily routines there.

He also had supervised visits with an uncle in Jackson, where he spent time with other family members, and he has continued to speak to young people around the region about his crime, his incarceration and his rehabilitation.

Abraham got a job in December at Maxey in maintenance, where he works four hours a day cleaning classrooms, waxing floors and preparing the rooms for special events.

Jack Haynes, a court appointed psychologist who met with Abraham three times in December, described Abraham's progress as a "mixed picture, mostly positive."

Abraham, who has been diagnosed with a severe personality disorder, seemed to feel remorse for his victim and for himself for being in this situation, Haynes said.

Haynes recommended that Abraham continue with supervised visits off-campus until April, when he would be allowed unsupervised visits to the same places and continue counseling and speaking engagements.

If his progress is adequate, Haynes said Abraham should begin his time in a halfway house by July.

At the start of the hearing, Abraham greeted his lawyers and waved to his mother, Gloria.

By the time he's released, Abraham will have spent nearly half of his 21 years at Maxey in Green Oak Township. It's the longest stint at the facility, where the average stay is three years.

At Tuesday's hearing, Judge Eugene Arthur Moore asked the Maxey staff how they transition juveniles into halfway houses without upsetting the surrounding community and whether Abraham could get a job on the outside before he left Maxey.

One of Abraham's lawyers said she hoped the media coverage of the case would lessen in order to let Abraham make progress on his rehabilitation. That didn't sit well with Carley, the chief deputy prosecutor.

"Let's not forget why (we) are here today. He did kill someone. He was convicted of second-degree murder," Carley said.

Last year, Moore had told Abraham's lawyers he would like to see Abraham moved to a halfway house by now, when he has one year left under state supervision. But everyone on Abraham's case has agreed that until he improves his behavior, he will have to remain at Maxey.

Moore did not make a decision on Haynes' recommendations. He scheduled the case for another review hearing in May. What is left to decide is whether Abraham should be in a step-down program that eases him back into society or whether he should be kept at Maxey until he is 21.

At the end of the hearing, Moore, who has become a mentor of sorts for Abraham, asked the young man what he could expect to hear at the next hearing.

"Positive, all positive," said Abraham, who turns 20 on Thursday.

*You can reach Jennifer Chambers at (248) 647-7402 or [jchambers@detnews.com](mailto:jchambers@detnews.com).*

# Killer has one year left in state custody

Web-posted Jan 18, 2006

By STEPHEN FRYE  
Of The Oakland Press

With one year and one day until his mandated release from state custody, Nathaniel Abraham, a killer at age 11, looks at himself as sitting in a car and facing different options.

In a regular review hearing Tuesday for Abraham, Advertisement

Annette Henderson, a social worker at the W.J. Maxey Boys Training School, where Abraham is housed, said he sees himself facing three potential roads.

Two of the roads have curves and are crooked. One leads straight ahead, and it's there that his grandmother in heaven points him, Henderson said.

Abraham, who turns 20 on Thursday, often uses metaphors to describe what he is feeling, she said.

"It's good that he acknowledges that he has options," Henderson said, adding it is important that he realizes the difficulty of his task and that it is his to accomplish. "He's behind the wheel in the car alone."

The hearing ended with another review scheduled for May 2, when Oakland County Probate Judge Eugene Arthur Moore may consider allowing Abraham to move into a halfway house and begin to adapt to living in the general public.

Abraham, who shot Ronnie Greene Jr. to death in Pontiac, said he is working to succeed in the state's juvenile rehabilitation programs.

"From the last hearing, I took everything seriously," he told Moore. "I just took a real deep self-evaluation."

Since his last court appearance in November, Abraham has continued to attend alcoholics and narcotics anonymous meetings, speak to youths about his own troubles, look into college courses and study job placement opportunities.

At age 21, no matter how his rehabilitation goes, Abraham will be released because he was sentenced as a juvenile after his conviction for second-degree murder in 1999. He had been tried as an adult, charged with firstdegree murder.

On Tuesday, the teenager heard from the victim's family that it will not be easy once he is freed from custody.

"I'm praying and hoping that nobody has to go through what we went through," said Greene's sister Nicole Edwards. "The Lord knows I pray for you. It's not getting better out here."

The warning has prosecutors concerned that a boy who came from a troubled home and became involved with drugs and violence at a young age will succumb to those problems when the daily stresses of life affect him.

"I'm not convinced he's rehabilitated," said Deborah Carley, chief deputy Oakland County prosecutor. "Let's not forget why Ronnie Greene's sister is here today. He killed somebody. We should not forget Ronnie Greene."

Greene, 19, was shot to death outside a Pontiac convenience store in October 1997. Abraham did not know Greene.

On Tuesday, Abraham's court-appointed guardian, Elaine Rosati, said that reentering society will be more difficult for Abraham because of the public scrutiny, citing a Jackson-area newspaper publishing a story about Abraham visiting his family there. Moore has allowed supervised visits with an uncle living in Jackson.

But Carley said media attention is something Abraham is going to have to handle.

"We've had so much time and money invested in Nathaniel," Carley said. "We hope he doesn't let us down. The public is watching. It's Nathaniel's turn."

Carley was happy to hear about what's on Abraham's mind, based on what he told the social worker.

Henderson said Abraham is worried about the community not supporting him, finding an adequate job, being taken seriously, cutting ties to his past and avoiding falling in with the same crowds and same troubles as his youth, and even dealing with women.

"He's taking a very realistic approach to his future release," Henderson said.

During the recent review hearing, the discussion addressed whether Abraham will return to Pontiac, which is uncertain. If he does get permission eventually this year to enter a halfway house, it would likely be north of Oakland County, though a specific one has not been named. Social workers said Abraham is still considering a future as a barber.

The hearing Tuesday also featured sparks between Moore and Carley over Moore inviting an expert in juvenile troubles to testify. Margaret Beale Spencer, a professor from the University of Pennsylvania, said that rehabilitation is more important than punishment for youths re-entering society for juvenile crimes.

Moore said he has heard plenty from lawyers on what should happen with Abraham, but neither prosecutors nor defense attorneys had presented any expert opinion on what is best for juveniles in returning to society.

"I've decided I'm going to try to find some," said Moore.

# Muskegon's early childhood programs get \$150,000 boost

Sunday, January 17, 2006

By Lynn Moore

MUSKEGON CHRONICLE STAFF WRITER

A \$150,000 grant awarded to the Muskegon area is more than an opportunity to assess and plan for early childhood programs, according to an education leader involved with the local "Great Start" effort.

It's also a recognition of how well the community has done in organizing itself to address childhood needs so far, said Stuart Jones, program director of Head Start of Muskegon-Oceana. Just seven counties statewide were recognized recently as "Great Start Collaboratives" -- recipients of grants ranging from \$90,000 to \$150,000 to develop strategic plans for helping young children.

Muskegon received \$150,000 -- money that will be funneled through the Muskegon Area Intermediate School District. By receiving the funds to develop a plan, the area will be eligible to receive more money to implement programs later on, Jones said.

In all, \$1.24 million in grants were announced last week, including seven grants to communities considered "nearly ready" to be Great Start Collaboratives, in addition to those that already are. They are the first communities to receive funding from the Early Childhood Investment Corp., which is dedicated to promoting early learning and childhood development activities and connecting them with the state's "Great Start" program.

Gov. Jennifer Granholm launched Great Start in 2003 as an effort to coordinate state services to children, and expanded the effort last year with the formation of the nonprofit public corporation. The organization is attempting to leverage public and private money to expand the availability of high-quality early education and child care, including parenting education.

But to access that money, communities first need to be named Great Start Collaboratives and develop the strategic plans, which will include needs assessments.

"We couldn't qualify for this money without a long history of evidence that the community is responding to early childhood needs," Jones said.

Jones pointed to his own Head Start preschool program as evidence of collaboration. When the MAISD took over the program in 2000, it brought in local school districts to house Head Start programs and help operate them.

Jones also pointed to high-quality medical and dental services available to children through Hackley Community Care and Muskegon Family Care clinics and the Community Coordinating Council, which, among other activities, plans parenting events and helped bring together community resources at school-based "family resource centers."

In addition to its collaborative history, Muskegon County qualified for the Great Start planning funding because of the percentage of children living in poverty. In 2002, 17 percent of Muskegon County children were living in poverty, according to Kids Count in Michigan. Granholm has placed a special emphasis on early childhood programs since taking office.

"Children learn more from birth to age 3 than at any other time, setting the stage for future success in school and in life," Granholm said in a statement about the Great Start grants. "High-quality early childhood development and care is a wise investment in our children and our economy."

The MAISD and about 30 "community partners" will work on the needs assessment and strategic plan that will prioritize initiatives the community wants funded.

That plan is required to receive further funding for specific initiatives.

Jones said he doesn't have to look far to see the need in the community. Affordable quality child care, mental health services for children and support to grandparents taking on the parenting role for grandchildren are just some of the "gaps" in services in the community, he said.

In addition, he pointed to 250 children in Muskegon and Oceana counties who are on the waiting list for Head Start, a federally-funded preschool for low-income 3- and 4-year-olds.

"That," Jones said, "is unacceptable."



## **Daycare Licenses May See Changes**

The committee room was unusually silent as Jim **GALE**, with the Department of Human Services (DHS), told Sen. Bill **HARDIMAN** (R-Kentwood) that not only is the DHS not required to tell parents when a child care facility their kids go to is under investigation for abuse, but it also does not suspend childcare licenses unless and until the care giver is convicted of the charge.

"I realize that everyone has rights here but, obviously, we want to protect the children in these situations," Hardiman said.

The Senate Family and Human Services Committee is reviewing how the DHS issues, reviews and revokes daycare and childcare facility licenses. Concerns were raised about the issue after it was revealed that an Oakland County family could have continued operating their childcare facility until the day they were found guilty of sexual abuse charges.

When someone issues a complaint about abuse in a childcare facility, the DHS investigates the complaint. If there's substantial evidence that abuse occurred in the home — the child testifies, the child's had a physical examination and the results show the child may have been abused, there's witness to the abuse — the DHS will hold an administrative hearing to revoke the person's license.

However, if the only evidence available is forensic, the DHS doesn't hold a hearing and the probability of the license being revoked rapidly declines. The DHS refers to forensic evidence as "hearsay evidence."

"We decide to revoke the license based on the sufficiency of the evidence," Gale said.

Looking back at the Oakland County case, the DHS should bring "hearsay" evidence to the attention of the administrative hearing judge and let him decide if the case has merit, Gale said.

Hardiman asked Gale if parents are notified when a daycare center is being investigated for an abuse case. Gale said no. Parents are only notified if the police or a DHS worker needs to ask the parent questions about his or her child concerning the case.

Under the Children's Protection Act, the DHS can't tell parents why a

facility is being investigated since investigations are not convictions. But they can tell parents that an investigation is being conducted.

Technically, parents might not learn about the investigation unless the person is convicted, which is when the DHS revokes the facility's license. Hardiman asked Gale to determine when the DHS should and could tell parents about a pending investigation.

A woman from Grand Rapids who spent several years working for the state investigating daycare facilities, which sometimes resulted in recommendations to revoke the facility's licenses, said the department often ignores the recommendations.

Though Gale agreed licensing policies have to be looked at, he also said the department is understaffed, which makes it hard for the department to keep up with regulations. The department is supposed to inspect 10 percent of the 10,000 family day care facilities each year but only got to 600 facilities in 2005, Gale said.

"This means we only look at the facility one time every 10 years," Gale said.

Hardiman asked Gale to do the following and come back to the committee with his results in 30 days so the committee can decide what to do about licensing regulations:

- A general review of the past three years, including the number of cases where recommendations to revoke licenses have not been followed through
- Review current laws to see if amended laws are necessary
- Show how the DHS and law enforcement officials communicate when charges are pressed, if at all
- When the DHS believes it's appropriate to notify parents if an abuse investigation is under way
- Clarify how the DHS handles pornography investigations
- Provide licensing policies as they were at the time of the Oakland case and as they've changed

No one speaking on behalf of daycare facilities testified before the committee. Hardiman was the only committee member present for the testimony.

Wednesday, January 18, 2006

Letters

The Detroit News

## **State burdens group homes with more rules Proposal adds massive costs**

As a nonprofit organization representing 1,500 adult foster care and home for the aged licensees throughout Michigan, we support the Dec. 31 editorial, "Group home wage meddling sends a job-killing message." We are not convinced that the new licensing rules proposed by the Michigan Department of Human Services would accomplish either of these purposes.

The proposed rules would impose massive new administrative responsibilities upon licensees that would divert resources away from direct consumer supports and services for more than 50,000 vulnerable adults. The rules also invade employee privacy, which makes employment in the assisted living field unattractive to many caring individuals. These proposed rules should not be promulgated.

*Robert L. Stein*

Rule changes help vulnerable

As an ombudsman for Citizens for Better Care and the mother of a 46-year-old developmentally disabled son who resides in a group home, I believe The News is too caught up in its disfavor of anything "union."

The vulnerable residents of adult group homes and assisted living centers need the protection from unscrupulous and dangerous employees who are not presently screened, certainly the good, compassionate employees who have not been paid fairly and often have no benefits whatsoever for their very difficult jobs, surely deserve what the proposed changes would accomplish: encouragement to stay on their jobs.

*Doris Austerberry*

Rules don't help residents

Kudos to The Detroit News for its Dec. 31 editorial urging the governor to halt the proposed licensing rule changes for adult foster care homes. As a parent of a young man with developmental disabilities served by a top-notch provider, what is most important to me is superb care and the warm, gentle relationship between my son and those caring for him. What I do not want is for my son's caregivers to be diverted by even more rules and reporting than the volumes they already shoulder.

This field is already one of the most heavily regulated, and the proposed rules have virtually no care-related purpose. In fact, my son's provider has estimated that these rules could cost the organization nearly \$50,000 annually, money far better spent on enhancing the lives of the people it serves.

*Carol Kaczander*

Rules favor unions

If approved as written, recently proposed rules for adult foster homes in Michigan will likely force some 36,000 residents (which include elderly, physically handicapped and mentally handicapped individuals) out of their homes. Numerous rules were added that favor homes that have a collective bargaining agreement in place. Much of the added regulation would require each home to create staff committees and additional burdensome record keeping and annual reporting, including employee wage and benefit references.

The higher wages and benefits for direct care workers will either be passed on to the adult foster care home residents or force these small group homes out of business.

*Mr. Sandy D. Mabery*

Don't kill existing homes

The rule changes would add millions of dollars of cost to the delivery of senior care services in Michigan through the creation of redundant and unnecessary paperwork. They would shift the focus of providers from the provision of care services to compliance with paperwork regulations. They would expose staff to the invasion of privacy and identity theft. And they would drive operators out of business.

If Gov. Jennifer Granholm is serious about creating a positive business environment in Michigan, she needs to defeat the proposed rules.

*Paul VerLee*

Beware state involvement

As a former member of the staff working with assisted living facilities, I agree with the editorial and believe we need to make sure that these "staffing" rules do not get changed.

There are a great many concerns that I would have if the state became involved with the facilities in this manner.

*R. Guilford*

*General Counsel Michigan Assisted Living Association Livonia Farmington Hills Oak Park  
Owner Pine Tree Place, Assisted Living Clarkston Pine Meadows Assisted Living Armada  
Westland*

## **BLOOMFIELD TOWNSHIP**

### **Space is leased for adult day care**

Bloomfield Township has found a space for its new adult day care program, scheduled to start in May. The township board approved a five-year lease agreement earlier this month for \$4,300 a month on Franklin Road in the township's research park. The program will be funded by a .25 mill tax increase voters approved in 2004 for senior programs.

# Adoption expert to visit

Wednesday, January 18, 2006

The Grand Rapids Press

GRAND RAPIDS -- Advice for adoptees and their parents will be offered by Sherrie Eldridge, author of "Twenty Things Adopted Kids Wish Their Adoptive Parents Knew" and "Twenty Life-Transforming Choices Adoptees Need to Make" will speak at 7 p.m. Thursday at Sunshine Church, 3300 E. Beltline Ave. NE. Admission is free, but donations will be accepted. A Michigan native, Eldridge is the founder of Jewel Among Jewels Adoption Network, Inc. Her Web site is [adoptionjewels.org](http://adoptionjewels.org). Bethany Christian Services is sponsoring the event. For more information, call Sunshine Church at 364-4242.

# Couple help people through ministry

Wednesday, January 18, 2006

By Shannon Maynard  
For the Citizen Patriot

Dave and Bev Goolsby have spent their lives helping and reaching out to people. For seven years, the couple were foster parents in Grand Rapids and Jackson, caring for more than 20 children.

Five years ago, Dave, 49, and Bev, 53, saw a need in the Jackson community.

"So many people are touched by the prison, and Jackson has one of the highest teen pregnancy rates in the state," Bev Goolsby said. "We want to lead as many people as possible to the love of Christ."

In 2001, the couple started Christ's Kingdom Ministries as a way to serve the community.

Through the ministry the couple organize a number of classes and events including Maximized Manhood, Women's Fellowship, food giveaways and movie nights. Sewing, cooking and quilting are a few of the practical skills also taught through the ministry.

"We started each ministry because of a need," Bev Goolsby said.

As the pastors of Christ's Kingdom Ministries, the Goolsbys use a hands-on approach for every aspect of the ministry. They drive people to the different events, teach the classes and counsel individuals.

While teaching is a significant part of what they do, it is not the most important.

"We meet them where they are and we lead by example," Dave Goolsby said.

Bev Goolsby agreed. "Jesus was an example," she said. "He was right in the middle of it."

Over the past five years, the couple have been surprised by the depth of some of the problems they have come across.

"Some of the problems go back generations, like alcohol and drug abuse. Oftentimes they fall back into it," Dave Goolsby said.

Although there are challenging parts of their ministry, Bev Goolsby feels they are able to offer people hope.

"I enjoy sharing the hope with people that things don't have to stay this way," she said. "I don't care how bad things look; nothing is too difficult for God."

While the ministry holds its services and classes at Jackson Arts & Technology Academy on Griswold Street, the food giveaway takes place at the Together We Can Make a Difference House at 224 W. Wilkins St.

In addition to serving with Christ's Kingdom Ministry, Dave Goolsby works as an analyst for Consumers Energy and Bev Goolsby homeschools one of their children.

The couple have been married for 21 years and have 10 children.

# Fired worker files lawsuit against charity

Wednesday, January 18, 2006

JILL ARMENTROUT  
THE SAGINAW NEWS

A former employee of the Underground Railroad has filed a lawsuit claiming that the Saginaw domestic violence shelter violated the Michigan Whistleblowers' Protection Act when it fired her.

Stacey Sheiko of Midland, who worked as director of community relations from September 2004 until her Oct. 19 termination, is asking for more than \$25,000 in damages from the Underground Railroad and Valerie Hoffman, its president and chief executive officer for 11 years.

Sheiko claims her sacking came after she reported the agency's "misappropriation of funds" to Michigan Attorney General Mike Cox's office.

Flint attorney Dean T. Yeotis filed the suit Jan. 6 in Saginaw County Circuit Court. The agency and Hoffman have 21 days to answer the suit. The Whistleblowers' Act protects employees who report a violation or suspected violation of law or regulation from termination or discrimination. Yeotis declined to offer further details of Sheiko's allegations. He said she contacted the attorney general's office in September to report her suspicions.

"We have reason to believe they were aware she contacted the office," he said.

The Underground Railroad annually helps hundreds of victims of domestic violence, sexual assault and stalking. Each year, the agency, on South Washington, gives shelter to more than 700 women and children and offers counseling and information to more than 1,400 people, officials said.

"My first obligation as the director is to make sure that the clients of the organization receive proper services," Hoffman said. "That means that sometimes tough decisions have to be made concerning the staff and how those services are provided.

"I have found during my

11 years that not everyone will agree with how the organization is run. My responsibility is to make sure that we comply with federal and state laws and grant administration guidelines while we care for those who need our services."

## **Directors receive surveys**

In another personnel matter, the attorney general's office sent letters Jan. 3 to Underground Railroad Board of Directors members who served in 2005 asking for responses to an anonymous complaint from a shelter staffer who claimed "verbal and mental abuse" from leaders and "mismanagement of funds."

State officials said a "Sally Jones" filed the complaint Oct. 13 via e-mail. They have had no other contact with the individual but are pursuing the investigation through the Consumer Protection Division, which licenses charitable trusts, said Melissia Christianson, spokeswoman for the attorney general.

Hoffman said no one named Sally Jones has ever worked at the Underground Railroad.

The complaint alleges that staff members complained to board members about their treatment by managers and that soon after, "deliberate harassment" of those involved began.



The complaint also asks for a financial investigation, saying "grant-funded money has been shuffled around so much within accounting that it cannot be kept track of."

"The whole thing is not factual," Hoffman said. "There is nothing specific in these complaints. This is a wild goose chase."

The state asked 16 past and present board members who received the letters to respond to the allegations within 30 days.

Board Chairwoman Mari McKenzie said the directors will discuss the issue at their next meeting Tuesday, and that she and Hoffman will draft a response. McKenzie wouldn't discuss the letter but said "we are concerned about it."

### **Complaints and turnover**

In addition to Sheiko's firing, four other employees have left the agency since the fall.

Alicia Harrison, underserved populations advocate, and Trischa A. Zumbach, operations director, resigned in October. Jennifer L. McMahon quit as advocacy manager in late September. Each had worked at Underground Railroad about a year.

Hoffman also confirmed that the agency fired accountant Kimberly L. Moore of Midland in late December. Moore said she lost her job because she wrote a letter of complaint to the Board of Directors in August.

"I saw this coming," Moore said. "Other people (working there) are worried."

Former employees said more than a dozen employees have complained to board members or written anonymous letters about leaders mistreating them and ignoring complaints.

Hoffman said a small group, people who worked at the agency only a short time, have complained. Employees surveyed in December gave the agency high marks as a place to work, she said. There are 37 people on staff.

### **'Negative' bosses**

Eleven former employees told The Saginaw News that employee turnover and dissatisfaction are long-standing problems at the agency. Each worked at the shelter within the past six years.

Sandy Sepulvedo of Saginaw Township said she worked as program manager for two years before the agency fired her in March 2002. She now works at a university in Flint.

"There was a lack of trust in the organization; people didn't feel valued. No one wants to harm the agency. I worked there because I am a survivor of domestic violence. It's not good for clients to have employees constantly turn over."

Josefina P. Federspiel of Thomas Township ran the shelter day care for three years starting in 1999 before she resigned.

"There is so much tension in the building that clients aren't served as well as they could be," she said. "Women working there are worn out by it."

### **The work is stressful**

Crisis work at small nonprofit agencies is stressful and they do experience high turnover rates at times, said Barbara J. Rajewski, former executive director of the Bay Area Women's Center in Bay City, who left that job this month to take an accounting position at the Underground Railroad. She said she needed a change and is "loving" her new job.

Demand for services at the Underground Railroad remains high. Shelter occupancy has topped 100 percent capacity for the past year, Hoffman said. Staff have had to turn women away when no beds were available, she said, and all transitional apartments are filled as well.

A fundraising campaign to build a second shelter at another site started last year. Leaders kicked off the "Raise the Roof" initiative at an Oct. 9 benefit at the Temple Theatre. That raised nearly

\$80,000, Hoffman said, but the campaign is on hold as the struggling Saginaw economy faces fallout from the Delphi Corp. bankruptcy.

Jill Armentrout is a features writer and Neighbors coordinator at The Saginaw News. You may reach her at 776-9681.

# Parental visit bill deserves a look

## Targeting stubborn custodial parents might have benefits

Bitter parents who try to block their formerly beloved's access to the couple's child(ren) following divorce might think twice in New Hampshire, where a proposed bill aims to make life difficult for uncooperative custodial parents.

How difficult? By inviting the Department of Health and Human Services to investigate the offending parent for child abuse and neglect.

This relatively revolutionary move was the brainchild of Maine psychiatrist Dr. Stevan Gressitt, who has been working with legislators to put some teeth into visitation enforcement. New Hampshire HHS Commissioner John Stephens endorsed the idea, and a bill was sponsored by Republican state Rep. David Bickford.

Gressitt is hoping for a domino effect if the bill passes in New Hampshire.

The idea behind such legislation is that children of divorce should continue to have access to both parents, assuming there's no reason to protect a child from one of his parents. While child visitation orders are taken seriously in theory, the legal process of enforcement is usually time-consuming, laborious and expensive. In practice, the failure to take them seriously leads to an ever-widening, and predictable, trajectory of distance between the child and visiting parent.



KATHLEEN PARKER

Bickford's bill would make it easier for parents denied visitation to seek remedy, while promising grief for parents who don't cooperate.

First, the noncustodial parent would get an expedited court hearing rather than take a docket number and possibly wait three to four months. Next, if the judge determines that the custodial parent is blocking access for no legitimate reason, then the Department of Health and Human Services would be notified of a possible case of child abuse and neglect.

Gressitt contends that denying a child his parent out of vindictiveness is a form of child abuse, but Bickford, a nonclinician, says he isn't ready to go that far. He explained to me that the bill supposes some parents may block access to hide abuse and that, therefore, the case warrants investigation.

He did say, however, that should there be a finding of psychological or emotional harm — a form of abuse — then the custodial parent could be prosecuted, referred for needed treatment, or lose parental rights.

I feel your cringe. Who wants government bureaucrats breathing down parents' necks to see who got little Johnny for the weekend?

I'm happy to lead the chorus saying family matters are none of the state's concern — let the adults hash out their visitation schedules. But abuses of this mannered approach assume qualities not always present in some adults and often leave noncustodial parents (usually fathers) bereft and angry.

The proposed bill is not without critics. As with any law related to personal relationships, this one could be tricky to enforce. Imagine a HHS social worker knocking on your door to ask why you didn't let Johnny see his daddy last weekend.

Such well-intentioned laws also could backfire. As one close observer put it in an e-mail exchange, "Getting (HHS) involved is usually the worst thing to do. They usually side with the 'Mom who is concerned about letting the kids go to their father' and, (investigators) may decide that neither parent is fit. And take custody of the kid(s)."

Such is the mess we have made of our lives.

What do you think? Write Kathleen Parker, Tribune Media Services, 435 N. Michigan Ave., Suite 1400, Chicago, IL 60611.

# **Federal food aid cut in state**

## **Senior citizens could be hurt the most**

January 18, 2006

BY SHABINA S. KHATRI  
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

For nearly 84,000 Michigan women, children and seniors who rely on the Commodity Supplemental Food Program to stock their pantries each month, affordable and nutritious food is hard to come by. Starting this month, it may get even harder.

Seventeen Michigan charitable groups received a memo this month from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, notifying them that their combined funding under the program would likely be cut by more than \$330,000 through the end of September. The USDA advised all 32 states in the program to immediately reduce the number of food packages they distribute.

In Michigan, the 9.2% cut would take about 7,700 people out of the program.

Groups are lobbying to get the cut rescinded, but if it sticks, it will affect 50,000 people nationwide -- mostly seniors, because CSFP gives priority to moms and children.

Detroit resident Barbara Smith, who relies on the program, could be shut out.

"If my program got cut, I guess I'd have to manage," said Smith, 66, who volunteers at the Detroit-based charity group Focus: HOPE, which feeds 42,000 participants monthly. "But I pray it don't, because I know there are so many people in my community and in church that need it more than I do."

Michigan is second only to Louisiana as the largest beneficiary of the CSFP.

"We don't want to remove people from the program," said Frank Kubik, CSFP manager for Focus: HOPE. "How can I go to someone and say, don't come back?"

Kubik, who is currently discussing the program with congressional representatives in Washington, D.C., cited rising food costs as the reason for the USDA's decision.

In previous years, farmers with surplus dairy products like cheese and non-fat milk donated them to the CSFP. But due to a lack of inventory this year, the Food and Nutrition Service, the federal agency that administers the program for the USDA, will have to purchase those products.

F&N spokeswoman Susan Acker declined to comment on the reasons behind the cut. But in an October memo to U.S. Sen. Debbie Stabenow, who expressed concerns about the possible cut, the USDA stated that "the purchase of cheese will, of course, affect the overall cost of the CSFP food packages, and all other things being equal, would mean that fewer people could be served in FY06 than in FY05."

Stabenow, D-Mich., called the cuts "outrageous" in an e-mail Tuesday to the Free Press.

"For more than 30 years, the Commodity Supplemental Food Program has been one of the first lines of defense against hunger for low income women, children and seniors," she wrote. "I have been fighting these cuts and will continue to work to restore funding to help Michigan seniors and families."

Charities expect the USDA to reach a final decision on the cut within the next few weeks. In the meantime, many groups will freeze enrollment to keep numbers down.

Regardless of whether funding is restored, Acker encourages seniors to utilize other federally subsidized services, including the Food Stamp Program, which helps nearly 1 million Michigan residents purchase groceries each month.

"That's a good alternative," said Kubik. But he said it won't help the thousands of seniors whose food packets are delivered each month because they are too ill to leave their homes.

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## **Shelter provides temporary haven**

By Maribeth Holtz  
Sturgis Journal

For Robert Keckler, the worst part about being homeless is not having a place to belong.

“To me, homelessness happens when you don’t have a place to call home,” he said. “It’s been hard, very hard.”

Keckler has been in three shelters in his lifetime and is currently a resident of KeyStone Place, St. Joseph County’s homeless shelter. He’s looking forward to moving into his new apartment in Sturgis on Jan. 18 — a move he said he couldn’t have made without the help of KeyStone Place. Because of his experience, he plans on coming back and volunteering three days a week.

“I want to let them know that they’re here to help, they’re not here to degrade anybody,” Keckler said. “I want to tell them, ‘It’s OK, you will get back on your feet’ or, ‘It’s OK, you will find a job.’”

KeyStone Place, now located at 640 E. Main St. in Centreville, has been open since March of 1996. It serves about 80 families a year, including 122 children, but these numbers will probably change because of the new facility which offers space for singles, said Kelli Tackett, director of KeyStone Place.

The new building, which opened in August, is about 6,700 square feet and has 10 bedrooms, four more than the old facility had. Tackett said they’re glad to be in the new facility, which can house up to 25 people and was built by Building Trades students.

“The students did a fantastic job and we’re just thankful for all the community support,” Tackett said.

The new facility offers more potential to help more people, Tackett said, and with about 12 families a month waiting to get in, the extra space was needed.

She said while they do see some substance abuse and mental illness as being the causes of homelessness, about 80 percent of people become homeless because of just not having enough money to pay bills. She said a lot of people are just one paycheck away from

being homeless and when something sudden comes up, like car problems, they're left with no money for rent.

Sandra Walker of Constantine came to KeyStone Place three weeks ago with her children, ages 14 and 16, when it became too cold and cramped for them to live in their car anymore. She said when it was too cold at night the kids would sleep in the homes of family members, but even they are running out of space or are having a hard time paying bills.

Walker said she likes the community at KeyStone Place and is finding help.

"We're in the same boat," she said. "We help each other as best we can. It gives us a safe place to stay with our kids while we're doing what we need to do to get them their own home."

People can stay at KeyStone Place for 30 days and are worked with in order to find jobs and housing. Extensions are allowed after the 30 days are up.

Tackett said the majority of the people who come to KeyStone Place find hope, with the repeat rate being 5 percent. She said most work very hard not to return and work with case managers to find a home and job and pay all of their bills.

Shuquanta Stewart is a case manager that works with people after they leave KeyStone Place. She meets at their new homes, transports them to jobs, and brings furniture, clothes and supplies to help them get back on their feet up to two years after they leave.

Stewart decided to work at KeyStone Place because of the help she received from there in 1999. She was homeless and the program not only gave her the financial help she needed, but also the moral and emotional support.

"I love it here," Stewart said. "I wouldn't trade it for the world. I know the Lord put me here because it's all in my heart."

Stewart now plans on getting a degree in social work.

KeyStone Place receives 65 percent of its funding from state and federal grants. The rest comes from local donations from individuals, businesses and organizations, including the United Way. Tackett said they are always in need of more donations.

Tackett said while the shelter is always full, the solution is not to have more shelters in the county to help the homeless, but rather more affordable housing.

"I think the real solution is to have permanent housing for residents because I believe that jobs and housing is the key to ending homelessness," she said.

The people of the county are generally supportive of the homeless and instead of looking down on them, they ask questions as to why they're homeless, Tackett said.

Keckler said he thinks the general public has no idea of what it's like to be homeless and they won't know until they've been there themselves.

"If they haven't been through it they don't need to ridicule us, because one day they'll be there," he said. "If not, somebody close to them will be."



# **Detroiter in line for state youth office**

## **She's to be named ombudsman today**

January 18, 2006

BY JACK KRESNAK  
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

Verlie Ruffin, a children's advocate and policy expert for more than 30 years, is to be named today as Michigan's next children's ombudsman, a spokeswoman for Gov. Jennifer Granholm said Tuesday.

Granholm is to nominate Ruffin, a 58-year-old Detroiter, to be the state's fifth children's ombudsman since the position was created in 1994, said spokeswoman Liz Boyd. The appointment is subject to approval by the Michigan Senate. In the post, Ruffin would be in charge of a staff of 10 professionals from a variety of disciplines. The office investigates about 1,000 complaints a year about the treatment of children in the state's child welfare system, including Child Protective Services, foster care and adoption. The salary hasn't been set. Much of the work on behalf of children is done by a consortium of private nonprofit agencies that Ruffin has represented since 1985 through the Michigan Federation for Children and Families, where she is associate director.

"I've always loved working with children and helping children," she said.

Ruffin fills a vacancy left by former Ombudsman Lynne Martinez, who resigned in May to run unsuccessfully for mayor of Lansing. She received bachelor's and master's degrees from Michigan State University, in 1970 and 1973.

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